

Navigating

"Can we get something over *there*?"
He pointed to the other side of Old Navy,
across the gulf of the escalator: a spectacular
spectacle of super-pink, splashed
with gold and lilac and aqua.
From the dull-hued camo-print of Boys 2T-7,
I could see the appeal.

"Sure honey, if you want to."
I lugged our dreary back-to-school cargo
as we wove our way over,
stopping at an island of frothy pink t's.

"They're not *too* girly..." he hoped out loud.
He picked one up, and we both
stared,
silently,
considering his judgment.

The shoulders were bunched, tied off in pink bows,
delicately cupped into sleeves trimmed in ribbon.
A light pink bunny, bows-in-ears, ribbon-in-tail,
covered cutely in the hot pink center of the shirt.
Glitter gleamed discreetly here and there.

My son smiled at the bunny, then looked up
at me,
searching,
his five-year-old cheeks
the soft pink of an Easter egg's fragile
shell.

I pictured the playground.
I remembered cruelty.
I broke the spell.

"Do you think you'll really wear this?"
The question flickered,
then settled like ash,
dulling his bright eyes grey.
It seemed he, too, already knew –
and he said what I didn't have to: "Well, maybe not to school..."

Ashamed of my cowardice,
of how it set a course for his,
I tried to revive
what I myself had destroyed.
"Let's get it! I love it!"

But the damage was done.
The bunny shirt remains:
a streak of desire adrift
in camouflage,
unworn in his bureau drawer.